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STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, AND ALSO PASS USAID/W
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SUBJECT: SUDAN - BLUE NILE STATE SITUATION REPORT

REF: KHARTOUM 1369

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Summary

¶1. On July 20, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI)
staff traveled through southern Blue Nile State. The team assessed
the progress of the USAID-funded Farmer-Nomad Peace Conference, the
status of local government capacity, transfer of authority to local
levels, and potential areas of conflict within governance
structures. USAID reported progress in adapting local governance
procedures in accordance with the stipulations of the Comprehensive
Peace Agreement (CPA). However, ambiguities in the Blue Nile State
constitution, administrative policies and procedures, as well as a
lack of sufficient capacity among the local government threaten to
slow this progress. After the rainy season ending in October,
thousands of returnees are expected to arrive in Keili, Yaboos, and
other areas. Currently, USAID is planning projects to provide basic
services for returnees in these areas. End summary.

Farmer-Nomad Peace Conference

¶2. Per reftel, the Farmer-Nomad Peace Conference has produced
agreement between traditional leaders and county and payam
government officials on policies to open key migration routes for
nomadic groups. In recent months, conflict has emerged over
seasonal migration routes in Blue Nile State.

¶3. According to the Commissioner of Kurmuk County, traditional
leaders in the conference agreed to five prerequisites on the
opening of migration routes: 1) the integration of the Sudan
People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF);
2) the integration of Sudanese government and Sudan People's
Liberation Movement (SPLM) police units; 3) disarmament of
individual nomads and farmers, who do not belong to the integrated
army or police forces; 4) demining of southern Blue Nile State; 5)
return and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs).
These agreements mark notable progress in resolving the core issues
between farmers and nomads.

Returnees

¶4. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Protection Officer in Kurmuk, most of the returnees in Blue Nile State have resettled around Yaboos and Keili towns.

¶5. According to the umda (traditional leader), 8,400 refugees from Keili fled to Ethiopia during the civil war, of which approximately 2,400 spontaneously returned in May, June, and July 2006. According to a report by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), this return was prompted by a fire that broke out in Sherkole camp, located in Ethiopia near the border with Blue Nile State.

¶6. After arriving in the Keili area, many returnees from Sherkole camp find themselves without access to safe drinking water, education, or healthcare. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that most returnees are currently living in relatives' homes. The umda reported that Turnase, Mayas, and Balaro towns may experience a strain on resources as returnees have begun to settle there. Reportedly, returnees need food, bedding, and cooking utensils. USAID forwarded this information to the UN World Food Program (WFP) and UNHCR for appropriate action.

¶7. According to local NGOs and UNHCR, returnees from Bonga camp, located in Ethiopia across the border from Upper Nile State, arrived in Chali town near Yaboos in Blue Nile State, where limited basic services had been set up. However, the villages surrounding Chali have even less services than those in the town due to a slow start to demining the area. Therefore, many returnees remain in Chali waiting for conditions to improve before proceeding to their final settlement communities in the villages.

¶8. Returnees from the Bonga and Sherkole camps are accustomed to standard basic services. According to IRC and UNHCR reports in 2003 and 2005 respectively, families in Sherkole camp lived in tukuls (traditional housing) and received monthly food rations. Additionally, the reports show that 69 percent of school-age

refugees attended school in 2005, four out of seven families had pit latrines, and the camps had more than one waste disposal drop hole for every 20 people. Preschools, primary schools, teacher training, and adult literacy and numeracy programs were available to the refugees.

¶9. According to returnees and traditional leaders, both returnees and the local populations expect basic services from the government as peace dividends and have expressed that continued delays could undermine the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of its citizens. Residents of Blue Nile State commented that people are frustrated at the lack of visible results of peace, especially following the signing of the CPA. (Comment: As a result of the state's location at the dividing line of the civil war and its current integrated government status, the state is considered a testing ground for the success of the CPA. End Comment.)

Local Governance Issues

¶10. The concept of "popular consultation" (Article 3 of the Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan and the Blue Nile States) is not well defined. Reportedly, most people still believe that the CPA includes a referendum for them to decide if they remain part of the north or are integrated into Southern Sudan in the event that the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) becomes independent. While a referendum is a direct vote by the population, popular consultation will only allow the public to express their opinions on the protocol and is not intended to decide on possible independence. Clarification of this process for the local population is essential and the timing of this information must be carefully considered.

¶11. The issue of whether Arabic, English, or a combination of both languages will be taught in public schools remains unresolved. According to the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC) and local NGOs, the local population in former SPLA-controlled areas

prefers to be educated in English. However, since Blue Nile State is administratively part of the Government of National Unity (GNU), the Sudanese government is proceeding with the standardization of the entire state to the national educational curriculum, which is taught in Arabic. This issue is expected to be an ongoing source of tension.

¶12. The Chief Judge for Kurmuk County, payam administrators, and traditional leaders reported that traditional and official local leaders have distinct roles in settling local disputes. Traditional leaders act as judges and administrators handle interactions between the community and the county government. In 1997, the umdas elected a representative to serve as the Chief Judge for Kurmuk County. The representative explained to USAID that in the future a Sudanese government judge will assume the position of Chief Judge, at which time the umda will resume his traditional role.

¶13. Progress has been made in integrating the local government in Kurmuk in accordance with the guidelines of the CPA. Article 11 Section 1.1 of the Protocol on the Resolution of Conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States specifies 45/55 power-sharing percentages for government staff. The Executive Director of Kurmuk County, a member of the National Congress Party (NCP), arrived from the formerly SAF-controlled state capital, Ed Damazin, the week of July 10. The Executive Director will work under the Kurmuk County Commissioner, a member of the SPLM, as part of the power-sharing agreement. Representatives of the state line ministries in Ed Damazin are also expected to arrive after the rainy season.

¶14. Ambiguities in local government administration threaten to disrupt future progress of CPA implementation. Officials interviewed by USAID expressed uncertainty about whether the power-sharing arrangements applied to lower levels of administration or not. The new Executive Director commented that his support staff are SPLM-affiliated and do not respect his authority, "severely limiting" the ability of the office to function. He believes that without proper administrative policies of authority in place, disciplinary action against SPLM staff, would lead to conflict. He expressed reluctance to bring NCP-affiliated staff from Ed Damazin to Kurmuk because without clarity of the power-sharing arrangements, the SPLM might view this movement as a "takeover". He also felt that the SPLM staff lacked the capacity to effectively perform their duties and needed training.

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Conclusions

¶15. Based on this assessment trip to southern Blue Nile State USAID concludes that:

A) Further support for peace dividends is needed. Activities to increase access to clean water, health care, and education, are needed especially around Yaboos and Keili. An assessment to verify the umdas estimations of returnees and needs in Keili and Yaboos is also recommended. USAID plans to support GOAL, an international NGO operating in Sudan, to implement water and health sector projects in these areas.

B) The county and payam governments need additional support in providing basic services, training on how to more effectively allocate resources, and office management skills. USAID/OTI is considering the provision of a borehole drilling rig, which will be the only one in the area after January 2007.

C) Although USAID is disseminating the CPA in Sudan, a more widespread and thorough effort is needed, especially in the Three Areas.

D) State parliamentarians need support in drafting and passing laws that better define and resolve major issues and ambiguities in existing legislation.

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